

♥ HEART HEALTH

Women, Stress And Heart Disease

(NAPSA)—When it comes to heart health and women, the role played by stress can't be stressed enough. This is in addition to other factors, such as diet, physical activity, and genetics that are known to contribute to heart disease in women.

According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2008 Stress in America survey, women report experiencing higher levels of stress than men—33 percent of women report an average stress level of 8 or above on a 10-point scale (vs. 27 percent of men).

"The link between high levels of stress and heart disease is well known and very real," says Katherine Nordal, Ph.D., executive director for professional practice at the American Psychological Association. "The good news is that by being proactive in their health care decisions and making healthy lifestyle choices, women can successfully manage their levels of stress and minimize their risk of heart disease."

In fact, the tools used to prevent stress are also those often employed to prevent heart disease. A healthy diet full of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, as well as regular physical activity such as walking, yoga or dance, all contribute to a healthy mind and body.

APA offers the following tips on how to manage your stress:

- Understand how you experience stress. Everyone experiences stress differently. How do you know when you are stressed?
- Identify your sources of stress. What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Is there anything you can do to change the situation or reduce your stress?
- Learn your own stress signals. People experience stress in



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Look for healthy ways to manage stress, such as meditation, exercising or talking things over with friends or family.

different ways. Learn to gauge your stress signals.

- Recognize how you deal with stress. Determine if you are using unhealthy behaviors (such as smoking, drinking alcohol and over/undereating) to cope.

- Find healthy ways to manage stress. Consider healthy, stress-reducing activities such as meditation, exercising or talking things over with friends or family.

- Take care of yourself. Eat right, get enough sleep, drink plenty of water and engage in regular physical activity, such as yoga, taking a short walk, going to the gym or playing sports.

- Reach out for support. Accepting help from supportive friends and family can improve your ability to manage stress. If you continue to feel overwhelmed, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behaviors.

To learn more about stress and mind/body health, visit the American Psychological Association's Help Center at www.apahelpcenter.org.